



# COVID-19 Stories from the Front Lines

*Note: Qualitative data collection conducted between March and April 2020. All stories are from the initial weeks of the pandemic. Some stories have been edited to protect the identities of the storytellers, and others have been edited or translated for language and clarity. Stories contributed by AFSCME, MomsRising, SEIU, United Farm Workers and the UFW Foundation.*

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## Arizona

### *Paramedic from Lake Havasu City, Arizona (Story from AFSCME)*

“Patti Davidson’s husband works from home. Like millions of Americans across the country, he has been teleworking ever since employers in the private sector, as well as some local and state government agencies, began shutting down their office buildings to help stop the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Not so Davidson herself. A paramedic in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, the AFSCME Local 2960 member is among those Americans who don’t have the option to telework. On the contrary, like many public service workers across the country who are members of AFSCME, she is on the front lines of the fight against the pandemic. Her community is relying on her and her co-workers – as well as on nurses, school employees, custodians, child care workers and more – to stay safe.

Yet, first responders like Davidson are not getting the full range of resources they need to do the best jobs they can.

‘We’ve been shorthanded, as far as staffing levels go, for quite some time,’ says Davidson. ‘We don’t have enough N95 masks or enough of the surgical masks they’ve asked us to place on patients. We don’t have the gowns or the full protective equipment we need. We have one in each truck for every provider, but if we use that there’s a minimal supply to go back to. At one point we almost ran out of toilet paper. One of our co-workers’ wives had to hunt down where we could buy it.’

Davidson works for American Medical Response (AMR), a private company that provides medical transportation services in communities across the country. Even as she and her co-workers are expected to battle a pandemic without precedent, they have to fight for even a minimum amount of respect from their employer.

‘At the corporate level, they are attempting to do a little bit more, but the local manager is less likely to be helpful,’ says Davidson, a 13-year employee.

She added that when she recently took half a day off to care for her grandson because her daughter is ill and schools are closed, the manager tried to write her up.

‘He tried to give me a demerit that could lead to corrective action,’ Davidson says. ‘I had to argue with him over that.’

Lack of respect is something Davidson and her co-workers have always dealt with.

‘We do kind of feel left out of the picture at times,’ Davidson says. ‘It’s frustrating when they thank the doctors and the nurses and nobody ever specifically mentions first responder EMS who are out there trying to get stuff done. We’re responding to heart attacks and strokes and you don’t know what kind of a house you’re walking into, what other sicknesses are going on. You get exposed to a lot of other things as well, and here we are, worried about getting masks, struggling to get Lysol and wipes and gowns and protective gear.’

AFSCME members have been calling on the federal government to fund the front lines, and a \$2.2 trillion stimulus bill that is near completion would partly get us there. Our union will not rest until Davidson and her co-workers are treated with the respect they deserve and have access to the resources they need to do their jobs and stay safe.”

## California

### *Farmworker from Cutler, CA (Story from UFW)*

“I work in a nursery that cultivates all types of fruits, vegetables and plants. If I don’t work, there’s no harvest to eat. I am a temporary seasonal worker, but the only benefits I have are life insurance and 30 hours of sick pay. I think that temporary seasonal workers like myself should also have the same benefits as other workers (such as family leave, a savings plan, vacation days and paid holidays).

I had been called in to work, but this was only for a week. Right now I’m not working and am currently waiting for my unemployment, it’s been over two weeks and I haven’t received it yet. I don’t have any masks to protect myself and all I can do is wait. My worry is that the costs of things are increasing a lot and there is almost no healthcare access because they are prioritizing those who have COVID-19. I also have to take care of my daughter, and my work income is ending but my unemployment has still not arrived.”

### *Emergency Medical Technician from Woodland, CA (Story from AFSCME)*

“The coronavirus pandemic spurred Emergency Medical Technician Blake Andersen, a member of United EMS Local 4911, to respond rather than shrink away – even if that meant asking to be sent to the most dangerous front line in the battle against COVID-19.

Andersen served as part of a ‘strike team’ of EMS professionals deployed from the area around Yolo and Placer Counties in California and beyond, to Oakland, California, where the Grand Princess cruise ship was docked for a week. The ship was quarantined offshore because several passengers had become infected with the coronavirus, potentially exposing thousands of other passengers and ship personnel.

The vessel has now finally left Oakland after discharging all the passengers and will be quarantined in a remote dock in nearby San Francisco before all crewmembers can leave.

Anderson, who works for the private ambulance company American Medical Response (AMR), spoke to AFSCME Now when the cruise ship was still docked in Oakland.

‘We’re here to assist the federal government and state government in making sure patients are taken care of and have the assistance they need,’ Andersen said.

He was ready around the clock to help evaluate patients whenever needed.

‘We wait to find out if there’s anyone who we deem as a patient,’ said Andersen, meaning someone showing clinical symptoms of a coronavirus infection. ‘It takes a lot of coordination, but we’ll wait till the person is ready, so they can be transported to a hospital or other facility.’

Andersen said the majority of the more than 2,400 passengers on board didn’t appear to have any symptoms or signs of infection.

‘There is occasionally a person who has symptoms and is awaiting testing for coronavirus,’ Andersen said, adding that he worked with other medical professionals to facilitate the transport of those patients to the proper facilities.

A little more than a week ago, 21 people on board the ship had tested positive for the coronavirus. At least one has died.

Despite the fact that Andersen worked constantly, with only sporadic breaks, and despite the danger that COVID-19 poses to everyone, it was a job he volunteered for.

‘Any time something like this comes up, I try to help out as best as I can,’ said Andersen. Last year, he was sent to the Camp Fire, which ravaged Butte County, California.

Andersen was also one of three AFSCME members who joined AFSCME President Lee Saunders for a press call on Monday to share their stories of heroism, spotlighting the fact that most AFSCME members are on the front lines of the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

‘My unit is well equipped and prepared, but we also have peace of mind knowing that we have a union that has negotiated good benefits for us,’ said Andersen. ‘We do not have to worry that we will not be taken care of if we get ill.’

However, many workers do not have the same peace of mind. Saunders and the member-speakers called on the federal government to enact a far-reaching plan to address the crisis and mitigate the harm it will inflict on America’s communities and working families. The federal assistance package should include robust aid for state and local governments so they can invest in public services and take other critical steps like expanding their Medicaid programs to offer medical coverage to more residents.”

*Farmworker from Ceres, CA (Story from UFW)*

“In some regard we’ve been treated as essential workers, in some industries they’ve stopped work but they’re going to pay them less than 40 hours and in my case I do have to work. On Monday we did a training and the company gave us information on how to protect ourselves and wash our hands well.

We are worried and afraid that one of our family members will get sick because the virus is very bad. We are nervous about getting sick and we don’t want to go out.”

*Farmworker from Fresno, CA (Story from UFW)*

“I do not feel like I’ve been treated as an essential worker because I am a human and there’s the possibility that I could get infected without any benefits or protections, nor legalization of my status. Because I am a farmworker.

We’ve been informed about the coronavirus at work. We have been told to wash our hands constantly, if we cough to turn our heads and cover our mouths and to not have groups larger than 10. The contractor has asked for us to bring our own masks and disinfectants to work. But I don’t have money to buy masks, hand sanitizer or disinfectants to protect myself.

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted me because I’m low income and my family depends on my wages for transportation, rent, light, water, groceries, etc.”

*Farmworker from Fresno, CA (Story from UFW)*

“Everything at my workplace is the same, the only thing they tell me is to wash my hands more often but no changes have been made. Our employer told us that if we have symptoms of the Coronavirus we have to stay home but they did not mention anything about paying us sick pay.

I do not feel that my employer is doing enough to keep us safe. They need to have more consideration of us and help us maintain social distancing. We do not practice social distancing when working. At my job in the fields there are no benefits for us, the company has a specific doctor they send people to when someone gets injured but we do not get any benefits.

Coronavirus has impacted me and my husband because we have a daughter and we are not able to find anyone who will take care of her while we go to work. We had one person who was watching her but during these times of the coronavirus, my husband and I have to alternate who goes to work and who watches our daughter. We are also afraid because of the carpooling we use for work and even stopping at the stores after work is scary. We have been impacted financially and as it is we have a low income and now because of the virus, our income has been impacted because one of us has to stay to watch our daughter.”

*Farmworker from Salinas, CA (Story from UFW)*

“I feel that farmworkers are kept working under contagious conditions. Because they are kept working very closely next to each other without maintaining the distances recommended by the experts. We are working in fear of infection, and it’s not easy to get permission to go home.

We have been informed by the companies about coronavirus but only so they can comply with the rules or the law, because once we’re out working in the fields they don’t respect the law and have workers working next to each other at very short distances. My worry is that the pandemic will spread more.

Farmworkers are exposed to getting sick more because of the weather changes and in the morning it is very cold and many times it’s misty or raining and the farmworker gets wet and has very little protection. Later in the afternoon it gets hot and the farmworker gets dry in the same humid clothes, and because of that they’re at risk for getting sick.

I try to remain calm but there’s a lot of false information and people are entering into panic and going out to buy everything that’s not as necessary and leaving those of us who really need it unprotected.”

*Farmworker from Parlier, CA (Story from UFW)*

“As a farmworker I feel that they haven’t treated me as an essential worker because they are not giving me the same benefits and rights that any other worker has. They aren’t providing all of the benefits that I deserve, they are leaving me out because I am a farmworker and this also includes farmworkers who don’t have legal status. It’s not fair because farmworkers feed America and without us they wouldn’t have food in their homes. All farmworkers are essential and we deserve the same benefits as any other worker.

The companies are informing us about coronavirus but my worry is that farmworkers are not being taken into consideration in the help and benefits that are being given. It’s not fair that only people with papers are receiving help and the farmworkers who are here without status stay left out. They also pay taxes and it’s not fair.

The prices of produce and products have gone up also, and it’s too expensive for us as farmworkers. With this pandemic they should raise the wages because we are working, if we stop working there wouldn’t be food on people’s tables. All the grocery stores are empty, there isn’t any water, eggs or toilet paper. We also can’t find beans or rice.”

*Farmworker from Delano, CA (Story from UFW)*

“For me, I was really concerned about how the government continues to discriminate against us. If we are now essential workers, then why don’t we have more protections, like sick days. In Delano, it’s been two weeks since we stopped working. At work, they have not told us anything – not even how we should take

care of ourselves. It's on our own that we clean our hands well. For now, we are waiting for them to call us back for the grape pre-harvesting.

My husband and I decided that I would stay at home with my three children—ages 16, 13 and 7 years old—to protect them, and because the schools closed. It was a difficult decision because we try to work all year round, and, well, that is one check less. My husband is working very long hours at a dairy... Among themselves, the workers are taking care of each other, but they are very fearful of being infected by the coronavirus. I didn't know there was a 'food bank' until we had the necessity. The food ran out in two weeks. I went to go shopping, and everything had increased in price. I couldn't find rice, flour."

*Farmworker from Delano, CA (Story from UFW)*

"Now they are seeing that without farmworkers there won't be food on the table. They know that without our work there won't be harvests of fruits or vegetables.

I worry about being infected with COVID-19 by working without adequate protections. There are no benefits of any kind, just because we are working in the fields and our work is considered essential as farmworkers. There are no laws to protect us or benefit us, such as unemployment. Because we are undocumented, we have to work to try to sustain our families.

The prices of the food and products we need most have increased so much that sometimes it is difficult to choose between food and other things we need to protect our families, such as gloves and face masks."

*Farmworker from Bakersfield, CA (Story from UFW)*

"We have not been treated as essential workers because there haven't been the right protections, benefits, or pay for us farmworkers.

Our employers are not taking the necessary steps. They suggested social distancing but there's no enforcement. I am afraid of potentially getting sick, then not being able to work, and then not being able to pay for my rent, food, and medical bills. We do not have any benefits on the job.

Personally, Coronavirus has damaged me financially because I am not able to work as much as I used to and now I'm not going to school in person and I have difficulty learning the material online. I don't feel like I'm learning as much as I do in person. Also, we are not able to do things that we do normally, I worry about not having money to pay for rent & food—prices have been going up for necessities & we aren't making enough money. We still work while it rains but if it's too much rain we see an impact because we go without pay for the hours we don't work—we don't get any protections from the rain like a poncho we have to provide those for ourselves in order to keep working."

*Farmworker from Bakersfield, CA (Story from UFW)*

"Since the Coronavirus started, everything feels the same at work, nothing has changed. Our employer gave us a paper that says we are essential workers but we don't get any special treatment. The supervisors still pressure us for more work per hour.

At work they only tell us to cover our mouth but they do not provide face masks for us, they only recommend us to use them to cover our mouth if we have them and bring them from home. They do not have more areas for us to wash our hands, it is still the same amount of areas and restrooms as before the coronavirus. There are a lot of people working together, in my crew there's almost 60 of us working and

we do not practice social distancing, we are exposed to the virus. At work they do not give us things to protect ourselves with and we do not know if others are taking care of themselves. We have the necessity to work because we have to pay rent even if we work low hours. We still have to pay for car insurance, phone, food, everything. We don't even have benefits at our job.

Everything is more expensive at the store and anywhere you go, it's a few hours that we are working because of the weather that it's been raining. Prices of things at the store have gone up. My daughter who is 22 goes to work with me in the fields and my son that is 17 is still in school but he stays home to do his classwork. My mother who is 69 years old is living with us and I am afraid that if one of us is to get sick, she could get infected because she suffers from other medical conditions."

*Farmworker from Delano, CA (Story from UFW)*

"Fortunately, we were able to save up a little bit of money when we were working but now that we are not working our savings are being used to pay for our basic necessities. We have not been called back to work because of COVID-19, even though it's trimming season for grape vineyards. Although the government now says we are considered essential workers they do not treat us as such. We are always essential and we are always the workers who put ourselves at the greatest risks. Whether it is the heat, cold, exploitation, sexual abuse or a pandemic we are the most vulnerable even though we feed this country. If we were essential they would let us legalize and have health coverage. Right now I am working in a hotel part time to make ends meet since contractors are not calling us for the trimming season."

*Farmworker from Wasco, CA (Story from UFW)*

"Only right now they realize that we are essential but any other time they only care about residents and US Citizens. We were not included in the stimulus package and I don't think that is just. We contribute to this economy and pay our taxes. But when it comes to charging us or paying taxes or taking from us they do not hesitate. We have not received training on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 but we have small meetings with the supervisor before our shift. During lunch we now are seated fewer to a table and we are practicing social distancing. Our employer is also selling basic foods at reduced prices such as eggs, rice and beans. Fortunately, we are okay right now because we are still working and my children are safe, thank God."

*Farmworker from Bakersfield, CA (Story from UFW)*

"If I feel like an essential worker because we are working every day and haven't stopped. It makes me feel good because we cannot stop working, because if we stop then people will not have enough to eat.

My company has given us training on how we can take care of ourselves, how to distance ourselves and allowed us to keep our distance, they have provided masks for us to wear, and have given us time to wash our hands. If we get the flu, for example, they ask us to stay home. They remind us that they will pay us the three days of illness, but only that. This is good for me because they are taking precautions so that we are not contaminating each other at work.

I'm currently living with a lot of anxiety and stress. I care about what is happening in my community. But thank goodness, I don't know of any people who have the coronavirus."

*Farmworker from Bakersfield, CA (Story from UFW)*

“The company where I work makes me feel like an essential worker; they are following orders from above about informing us about how to protect ourselves. I feel like our government however does not really care about farmworkers. The government could do more to help us out financially. Like provide a bonus or pay incentive to go to work during this pandemic.

Our company has taken steps to stagger workers differently than before. The foreman is telling us if we are sick to stay home, but we do not get a sick pay leave incentive. The company also washes restrooms twice a day before and after lunch. They would normally only clean it once a week, if that, before the outbreak. They also provide enough water and soap for us to wash our hands.

My family has been impacted financially because they’ve cut my dad’s hours. My dad works as an irrigation specialist.”

*Farmworker from McFarland, CA (Story from UFW)*

“I feel essential because there we are, still working. We continue to work and we have not stopped. If we don't work, nobody eats.

But I also don't feel essential because we work in the same conditions as before, as if nothing has happened. They do not give us protection. Hygiene at work has not changed. Everything remains the same. They don't tell us to stay home if we feel bad or what benefits we have.

I feel stressed because my family is at home, crowded in a small apartment and because my children are not going to school, they feel locked up. My wife was laid off from her job at a daycare.”

*Farmworker from Delano, CA (Story from UFW)*

“My company is protecting us by distancing us from other workers. They ask us to wash our hands and remind us to wash our hands regularly and the rules of hygiene at work. The company reminds us that we only have 3 sick days per season, but they don't give us more paid sick days beyond. And if we miss a day of work, we have to provide a justification for why we failed to report to work.

We are afraid to ask for sick days for fear that they will send us to the company doctor and we will be fired or laid off from work. The coronavirus has impacted our family with a lot of mental stress. I drive to work with a lot of anxiety and come back home with even more stress because I’m afraid that we will contaminate my family.

The company where I work cut our hours recently; for example, we would be working 12-13 hours a day on a normal season, earning overtime, but now we only work 9 or 8 hours a day because there has been a drop in product sales.

I fear that later on our company will sell even less. It will impact us a lot financially. We are working very fearfully, very quietly, for fear of opening our mouths and risking contamination.”

*Farmworker from Lindsay, CA (Story from UFW)*

“There are lots of people in the fields working but I did not try to apply and I did not want to put myself or my family at risk. Yes, we are essential workers but they never make us feel essential or important. Without us farmworkers who would feed our country. The pandemic has caused us to be stuck at home



and we are trying to make the best of it. I'm spending time with my children and we have also gone to the food distributions at our local schools but I have stopped because I don't want to take my children out and put them at risk. I also know that some farmworkers have taken their children to work with them because they do not have child care."

*Farmworker from Oxnard, CA (Story from UFW)*

"In this crisis that we are undergoing, I'm a farmworker but just like everyone else I am an immigrant. I'm a farmworker, and the truth is that as a farmworker we do different types of labor depending on what the field produces. How has the crisis impacted us? Many things have impacted us because we are farmworkers and immigrants and we do not have papers. But many in our community need work because they're living day to day, making the minimum wage. This is worrisome, because there are families that need childcare, and with their wages they have to look for a way for their children to have childcare or they have to pay a babysitter. They have to find a way to have a job, so that they are able to pay rent. The wage is minimum and rent is high.

The majority of us are affected by wages and rent. During this crisis they tell us to stay at home, but we really can't because the rent continues to affect us.

We are worried about the virus because if we're infected with the virus how will we perform the work? If in reality we work minimum wage day to day, a farmworker can't have the right to rest and be in quarantine because everything affects us- rent, bills, family and children. All that we do, and all that we pay.

The companies are giving us information about the virus, but the letter comes to us through the crew foreman and not from company management or HR because they are also afraid of the coronavirus crisis. They give us information such as washing our hands. But in reality it's very difficult for them to see how it is in the fields.

For us as farmworkers it's really difficult to tell us to stay home or maintain social distance. It's different here in the fields than in the city. Here in the fields we might have crews of 30 people and we work in a team and to form this distance is difficult. We have to work in crews. For us as farmworkers we're trying to take care of ourselves but in reality it's difficult.

Our greatest challenge in daily life is we don't want to get to the point where we get sick, because our county doesn't have enough resources to maintain the health of each farmworker. In our job we have young farmworkers and farmworkers over 40 years old. If this happens in the fields we're talking about many farmworkers from many places that harvest the crops, fruits and vegetables. Maybe in the city they don't know where their food comes from, but they live alongside us in the same community. We have to have control in the fields by washing our hands and protecting ourselves because we don't want the coronavirus to arrive. We don't have enough money, and we can't afford to get sick because we have to maintain our families. This is the greatest challenge for us as farmworkers."

*Mother from Venice, CA (Story from MomsRising)*

"I'm a MomsRising member from California. My husband works on a TV show as a freelance cameraman and now the TV show has shut down production, meaning we have NO income at this time. We are in deep financial trouble. Additionally, my mother is going through chemotherapy and I cannot see her because of how compromised her system is, and because I cannot be tested to ensure I am not carrying the virus."

*Owner and Manager of Child Care Center from Chula Vista, CA (Story from AFSCME)*

“At Little Blossoms Child Care in Chula Vista, Calif., children and their caregivers talk germs daily.

While the topic has always been a priority for owner and manager Miren Algorri, she has approached it with renewed focus since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

As a child care provider, she is often the first to educate young children on how to keep germs at bay, including proper handwashing technique, sneezing into your elbow and washing your hands if you touch your nose.

‘Now when children sneeze into their elbow, we ask them to take off their garment and put it in a plastic bag,’ Algorri explains. ‘We’re being a little more mindful and cautious.’

The coronavirus pandemic has sickened nearly 200,000 people worldwide, including a rapidly growing number in the United States – more than 7,000 confirmed cases as of this writing. While most serious cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, are among the elderly, children can be carriers. As such, child care providers are playing a key, behind-the-scenes role in keeping our communities safe.

‘A teacher is potentially saving lives by teaching proper handwashing procedures that most grownups take for granted,’ says Algorri, a member of Child Care Providers United (United Domestic Workers/AFSCME Local 3930).

Yet in this time of crisis the federal government is failing such workers. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, approved by the House of Representatives, is under review in the Senate. Among other things, it would increase the federal contribution to every state’s Medicaid program, require that COVID-19 testing be covered at no cost, authorize \$1 billion in unemployment insurance, expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and provide paid leave for some workers.

To Algorri, all of that is fine except for one thing: child care providers are left out of it.

‘The bill should go farther,’ she says. ‘It should cover people like us, people who are underrepresented like we are, people who are overworked like we are... I have been licensed for almost 23 years and have not accrued one minute of sick pay. If we have to close, we are facing zero income. That future seems very eerie, very worrisome.’

AFSCME members are pushing the federal government to send more aid to state and local governments so they have the resources to continue to provide quality public services to their communities.

Even before anyone had heard of the virus, child care providers in California had taken matters into their own hands.

In September, after a 16-year struggle, they won the right to collectively bargain and organize a union. Although not government employees but small business owners, providers whose wages come in the form of a reimbursement from the state now have the right to negotiate together for better rates and working conditions, as well as for benefits and the training they need to provide quality service. In February, they filed for a union election, to be held in the spring.

In the wake of the public health crisis, Child Care Providers United has successfully lobbied the state government to make sure all providers who receive a state reimbursement get paid regardless of child attendance. In addition, some licensing rules have been temporarily relaxed and adult-to-child ratios may be waived to prevent or contain the spread of germs, so long as children are kept safe, among other victories achieved through their union voice.

‘Once the union election comes through and we get those yes votes, we will officially have a seat at the table,’ Algorri says. ‘We are not asking for anything out of the ordinary. A living wage, medical insurance, sick pay days, education and hopefully a retirement plan. These are the things that any working person deserves.’

It’s what, despite the current crisis, gives Algorri hope in the future.

‘We are very optimistic,’ she says. ‘Right now, as we speak, the future is very grim for many providers. I have heard from countless providers who have reached out to me, they’re wondering if we’re going to be forced to close and what’s going to happen next. But once we have a seat at the table, the future will be bright for us, at least here in California.’”

## Colorado

*Small Business Owners from Denver, CO (Story from Moms Rising)*

“My partner and I are both women small business owners and MomsRising members. She is losing her primary means of income - catering lunch at large office buildings that are closing as more people move to working from home. I own a small language school and have no way of earning income if people cannot come to in-person classes. I am working hard to make an online option available, but we will no doubt still lose business. Without a primary, steady income that isn't affected by coronavirus, we are concerned for the financial stability for ourselves and our two children, ages 6 and 8.”

*Speech Pathologist from Loveland, CO (Story from MomsRising)*

“I am MomsRising member in Colorado. I work as a speech pathologist for a small in-home health care company. I do not get any benefits through my employer. I have to get my own health insurance for me & my family and I can't earn any paid sick days. I get absolutely no benefits & only get paid for home visits completed, which is now zero because of COVID-19. Without my income, my family can't pay our mortgage or bills. What's going to happen to those of us who get no benefits or assistance from the companies we work for and aren't able to work from home?”

## Connecticut

*Public Library Custodian from Hartford, CT (Story from AFSCME)*

“Custodians have long been at the front lines of germ warfare, and their role has become exponentially more important during the coronavirus pandemic.

Leo Laffitte, a custodian for 18 years at the Hartford Public Library, a member of AFSCME Local 1716 and a district vice president for Council 4 (Connecticut), is one of those dedicated germ warriors.

Though public libraries throughout the city are closed, employees are required to come in for two days a week. While some take calls and check in returns, Laffitte and his fellow “maintainers” – the official title of workers who provide janitorial, carpentry and painting services – are on coronavirus patrol. He takes out the garbage, wipes down all the surfaces, cleans the restrooms, mops the floors and does maintenance on all facilities – just as he used to when working a full schedule before coronavirus pandemic forced work cutbacks.

‘We are really taking some vigorous interventions so we can protect us and the community. Since the library is a community hub – I call it the hottest ticket dayside in Hartford – we had a lot of people coming in,’ Laffitte says. ‘My boss is definitely taking care of us. He’s making sure we have enough gloves, enough bleach wipes, sprays and liquids to do our work.’

The library may also provide Laffitte and the rest of the maintenance crew high-tech vaporization machines – which emit clouds of sanitizing vapors – to clean up library property.

A mop, a bucket, antibacterial cleaners and, possibly, vaporization machines – these are Laffitte’s weapons of war. And he knows just how to wield them, too, having spent 41 years as a custodian and the last 18 at Hartford Public Library.

Laffitte and custodians like him across the country may get more equipment if the American Library Association gets its way. The group is seeking \$79 million from Congress to “deep clean” libraries nationwide so they can be as sanitary as possible before reopening their doors. That funding request is part of the ALA’s \$1.3 billion proposal for a stimulus package for the nation’s libraries.

‘We are out there. We are on the front line most definitely. Not everybody is as sanitary as you and I are,’ he says. ‘We have to provide those standards of cleanliness. That’s us. We have to provide that. When things like these episodes break out, we’re on the front lines.’”

## Idaho

*Farmworker from Parma, ID (Story from UFW)*

“Sometimes I feel like an essential worker and sometimes I do not. For example, when we greet our employer they respond to us when they want to and sometimes they simply don’t. I am grateful for my job. We are treated differently as field workers. We are exposed to all seasons and we don’t get any benefits. Luckily where I work I get decent pay. We farmworkers provide the food that our community eats.

I think the company I work for is trying to take precautions. They provide hand sanitizer in the bathroom. We’ve had to ask for hand sanitizer at times because sometimes we run out of soap. It’s not in their best interest if we contract the virus. My coworkers and I want to wash our hands, because we know our employer does not want to take responsibility if we were to get the virus. It’s affecting everyone. We are trying to make the best of the situation.

I’ve had the opportunity to go with our bosses to meetings of how farmworkers should be treated but they are always in English. It always seems like they are trying to wash their hands of who is held accountable. I once had an accident at work; my arm got caught on a machine. That same day they went and added a piece of metal so that when the inspector would go investigate the machine and they wouldn’t be held accountable. Everyone is trying to work for their own benefit. I would say I’m doing alright because I’ve seen the injustice in the treatment of H2A workers. I’ve seen how they are exploited. We aren’t that bad compared to them. I worry a lot about them during these times. No matter if farmworkers have legal status or not the virus does not discriminate.

My family and I have been impacted by coronavirus because less work means I am more worried about how I’m going to be paying for rent and the bills. I need to pay for our water and electricity bills. If I don’t pay one month it just starts stacking up. Emotionally, we are worried about our children and we don’t know what their future looks like. While most are stocked up, not all of us were able to get our groceries. I can’t find beans and the simple things that we usually cook: tortillas, eggs, rice. We can only get limited

quantities but we can't get out of work fast enough to go buy products such as water. Everyone is tense right now.”

*Farmworker from Kimberly, ID (Story from UFW)*

“I feel like an essential worker right now because we are still working regardless of the coronavirus. We have to keep the food production cycle running.

Where I am working I do feel like they are taking steps to protect us workers. My employers are ensuring we have distance between workers. Right now the tasks we are doing require us to be separated. We have been given soap and disinfectant and we also carry those supplies in our trucks. They have ensured we have been given gloves and also masks.

The pandemic has affected my household. It's been difficult because we cannot leave our household. I go from home to work straight back home. If we have an urgent errand we go and come back. We have been able to get some things we need but not everything. My wife has been going to the grocery store but has not been able to find corn flour.

We need to ensure our workers are protected from pesticides and other dangers. We've heard and seen at other ranches; workers are not protected and informed.”

## Louisiana

*Assistant Warden from Angola, LA (Story from AFSCME)*

“At the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Shirley Coody, assistant warden for administrative services and president of Local 3056 (Council 17), is also strategizing with colleagues to ensure that her co-workers and the offenders she's responsible for are safe.

‘We've got approximately 5,600 offenders and 1,400 employees. We're on 18,000 acres and the camps [where the offenders live] are spread out, which is a good thing,’ says Coody. ‘We have shut down visiting from the outside. We started that this past weekend.’

Religious groups that normally come in have been prevented from entering. Instead, offender ministry groups are now conducting services.

‘Any vendors that come in are questioned,’ says Coody. ‘Do you have a cough, or have you been around someone who's tested positive for coronavirus, or have you been out of the country?’ We're controlling what's coming into the institution.’

The temperatures of employees entering the prison's medical center are checked. Anyone running a fever higher than 100 degrees is sent home. Access to administrative buildings has been limited and is strictly monitored.

‘Someone is at the door asking questions about fever, cough, shortness of breath. There will be someone there all day long, asking everyone. We're trying to control the introduction [of the virus] on the grounds,’ she said.

So far, like Woods' facility, the prison where Coody works hasn't had any cases among officers or inmates. Coody knows, however, that if the virus enters the prison, it will spread rapidly.

‘Offenders are housed in open dormitories. We realize if one is exposed, it will spread throughout the dorm,’ says Coody. ‘We’re doing everything we can to control movements and gatherings. Everyone is washing their hands using proper precautions, including both offenders and employees.’

Staff is constantly passing out information and keeping everyone in the loop. Everyone at the prison has a part in fighting the virus’ spread.

‘We don’t want our officers exposing their families, and we don’t want their families exposing our officers,’ Coody said. ‘We’re trying to stay ahead of this before it can take hold.’”

## Maryland

*Gig Worker from Laurel, MD (Story from MomsRising)*

“I am a MomsRising member that works as an Uber and Lyft driver. I am also 70 years of age and a cancer survivor. It is not safe for me to be working right now and the demand for rides is extremely low anyway. Now my income is very limited.”

*Clinic Coordinator from College Park, MD (Story from AFSCME)*

“Celina Sargusingh, a member of AFSCME Local 1072 (Council 3), has a difficult balancing act.

As a clinic coordinator at the University of Maryland, College Park, Sargusingh is fiercely committed to the students and the larger academic community she serves. But she also has to protect herself from the coronavirus so she can stay on the job and fulfill her mission.

‘We have to find a way to balance our commitment to our students with our need to be safe in our jobs,’ Sargusingh says. ‘We are still on the front lines. We are still providing services.’

Although students have been sent home, some remain on campus – about 1,800 students, in fact. Some are still in dormitories. UMD has a large international student population. Sargusingh says students from Wuhan, China, or Italy, won’t be asked to return home. Some students are homeless. Some can’t afford to return home. Some are stuck due to travel restrictions.

Like other essential employees who are required to report for work at the flagship institution of Maryland’s public university system, Sargusingh is on a rotating schedule with reduced hours. Essential employees include workers in dining services, housekeeping, facilities and maintenance, and the university’s department of transportation. Many workers at research labs who need access to their experiments and studies are also coming in. A lot of UMD employees are teleworking.

Sargusingh works at a big health center where the normal staffing level is 70 to 100 people: doctors, nurses, medical assistants, lab techs. There’s a lab, a pharmacy; the health center provides, among other services, physical therapy, substance use intervention and treatment and occupational health services for UMD’s students, staff, faculty and the community.

Though there have been no confirmed cases on campus, Sargusingh she says it’s “more than likely” that she will or has come into contact with infected people “because the coronavirus is being spread by those who are not symptomatic.”

‘As a worker that is a concern for all of us, especially those with kids at home or elderly relatives,’ Sargusingh says.

Both of her parents are older with multiple health conditions that put them at high risk. She shops for food and medicine for them and, since the start of the pandemic, has been leaving the supplies on their doorstep. To avoid any risk of infecting them, Sargusingh doesn't meet her parents face to face.

She has two teenagers – a son, 12, and a daughter, 17. Her husband also provides critical services and is a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; he's also on the front lines like Sargusingh.

She says her supervisors at the clinic have been very good about making sure the workers are safe and have enough personal protective equipment. But those higher up in university administration are less responsive, she says. Essential personnel are asking administrators to clarify how they will be paid and how much, but they're not getting clear answers. As a result, Sargusingh says many workers are worried about making ends meet.

'We don't expect to be rich, but we do expect to be paid fairly. We are being asked to take the same risks as [medical personnel outside campus]. Most of us innately want to be on the front line. But we are not being paid comparably to the people who perform these functions outside the university. Honestly, that's just an unacceptable request,' she says.

Sargusingh says she gets 'fluffy emails' from the university leaders 'about how "we are all in this together." No, we are not all in this together.'

'The lower-wage workers are the ones who are expected to be in the front lines, but they are not the ones who are even included in the conversation about the way things are being conducted right now,' she says. 'A lot of advocacy has to take place for our workers. Nothing is given to us.'"

## Minnesota

*Registered Nurse from Minnesota (Story from MomsRising)*

"Marianne works full-time as a registered nurse in a Minnesota hospital while raising a young family of four. Marianne is only allowed three paid sick days per year. Working in an emergency room, she has had high exposure to illnesses, and, given her role as a caretaker, it is critical that she is not ill while looking after already vulnerable patients. But how can she afford to do that with only three paid sick days? Any parent in this room can attest to the fact that when you are raising a family of four, three days is not going to cut it." – read to the House Committee on Education and Labor by Rep. Ilhan Omar, MN-5

*Homecare Worker from Aldrich, MN (Story from SEIU)*

Ensuring paid sick and family leave for healthcare professionals would give Sandy Willis, of Minnesota, the peace of mind of knowing that they could protect themselves and their loved ones if they get sick.

When she isn't caring for Americans with disabilities, Sandy is caring for her grandson August. She's very worried about how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact both her and her grandson.

"Doctors say that if my grandson catches COVID-19 that it would be his demise, but since agencies aren't providing essentials like masks and rubbing alcohol, and shelves are wiped out, I have to go to multiple stores to find what I need," she says. "It's not safe out there. I expose myself and then have to go back to my grandson exposing him as well."



If Sandy had paid sick leave, she wouldn't have to worry about going to work sick and risking her and her clients' health because she needs to support her family and she wouldn't have to worry about exposing her own family if she is exposed because she doesn't have access to the equipment she needs. She says the government should be providing home care workers with the necessary equipment and information they need for their jobs during this pandemic.

"The state should be sending us the latest guidelines of how to protect ourselves from COVID-19. They should be supplying the masks, hand sanitizers and all equipment we need to protect us and the clients," she says adding that guideline materials must be multilingual.

"A huge number of homecare workers in MN are women of color-- Somalian and Asian and Pacific Islanders --- so how do they expect everyone to know about this new timesheet policy? People are NOT going to get paid at the time they need it the most," says Sandy. "They should be putting it out in Somalian, Hmong, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Chinese-- they should be sending it out in all languages not just English."

## New Mexico

*Small Business Owner from Santa Fe, NM (Story from MomsRising)*

"I'm a MomsRising member and I have had a small skin care business since 2003, although I have practiced skin care for over 30 years. Because of COVID-19, I have no business and am struggling to keep afloat and not lose my only investment to survive my retirement – my home. I am very worried that without being able to see clients for skin care, I will lose it all. It's a lot to face at this point in my life."

## New York

*Freelance Writer from Brooklyn, NY (Story from MomsRising)*

"I am a freelance writer and mother of two elementary school aged children. I'm also a MomsRising member. I just lost a contract worth 12K when the events I was writing scripts for were canceled due to COVID-19. My husband - a musician - just had two tours cancel because of coronavirus. That's all our income for the rest of the winter and spring, gone. We are sheltering at home now, trying to minimize risk to ourselves and others and get out of the way so people who do get sick can get the help they need. But we need help, too. We need to know we won't be evicted if things get really hard and we can't pay our rent. We need to know we won't go completely broke if one of us needs to be hospitalized. We are especially concerned about our older daughter, who has Type-1 diabetes. We want to know that if she contracts the virus and gets sick, she will be cared for with the best available treatments, but this is all uncertain right now."

*Unemployment Claims Processor from Binghamton, NY (Story from SEIU)*

If you want to know why states and local governments need massive support in this pandemic, ask Mary Booker of Binghamton, NY. The 59-year-old mother has been serving as an unemployment claims processor at the NY Dept. of Labor for the last 30 years. She's supported thousands of the state's unemployed workers through two recessions, 9/11 and SuperStorm Sandy but Mary says the COVID-19



pandemic has been harder than any of these events. More than 800,000 New Yorkers applied for unemployment benefits in March compared to only 52,500 people last year. The influx of unemployment claims has caused Mary and other unemployed claims processors to work 7 days a week.

“It’s not only stressful for our clients, it’s stressful for the workers. I don’t get to see my family. None of us see our families,” says Mary. “By the time we get home, we just collapse. I’m lucky if I get to go to the grocery store.”

Despite the challenges, Mary is committed to ensuring her clients have what they need during this difficult time.

“We are therapists for these people. We are their financial advisors,” she says. “We need more funding to prepare us.”

Additional investments in training and new technology is urgently needed to update our public services infrastructure and equip Mary and other public servants to deliver essential services in this crisis and beyond.

*Mother from Batavia, NY (Story from MomsRising)*

“I’m a MomsRising member with two kids and I am expecting my third. My oldest child is nine and she receives free breakfast and lunch at school. Our family lives from paycheck to paycheck and having to buy more food than usual with her home from school is negatively impacting our ability to pay other bills. My infant child also receives free meals and formula at his daycare and while his daycare has not officially closed as of yet, a closure is impending.”

## North Carolina

*CPS Case Worker from Snow Camp, NC (Story from MomsRising)*

“I am a MomsRising member and single mom with my youngest in 9th grade. I have asthma and other underlying health issues. I am considered essential, doing in-home services related to CPS cases. I am terrified of getting sick because I would only have three days of PTO to use. I would lose my car first as whatever money I had would need to cover my rent to prevent eviction. My job would be lost as my car is how I commute 35 miles one way to work daily. I am at risk to exposure through my job and am in a high risk group if I get it. My choices right now are work to pay bills or cut back to preserve my life/health. No one should have to make that choice.”

*Waitress from North Carolina (Story from MomsRising)*

“Katherine Austin, a working mom in my district said this, ‘I have never once had a job that offered even unpaid sick days. It’s rough knowing that if I call out of work for being sick or for needing to take care of my sick child, I can lose my job. I have had to wait tables while vomiting and running a fever because my employer told me I had to come in or I would be fired. I have passed out while working because of dehydration from vomiting. I have had to keep my sick child at home with me because his daycare sent him home with a fever, but my boss said they would fire me if I stayed home with him. Why should we

have to choose between our health and keeping our jobs?’’ – Read aloud to the House Committee on Education and Labor by Rep. Alma Adams, NC-12

## Ohio

*Food Service Manager from Columbus, OH (Story from AFSCME)*

*“Editor’s note: The following is a story from the front lines of the fight against COVID-19, as told by a member in Columbus, Ohio. This interview was conducted on March 18, shortly after Ohio schools were shut down:*

‘My name is Donna Ragland. I’m a food service manager, I work in Columbus Downtown High School. I’ve been a manager for 24 years and with the school for 26 years. I’ve been with OAPSE 20-plus years and am vice president of Local 143.

We go to our meetings and let the public know they need to stock up on medicine and food and keep some cash on hand. We pay attention to the elderly and make sure our kids are well fed. We make sure to clean everything thoroughly and keep in touch with our locals throughout the city.

We have food at 13 sites so any child of any age can come take breakfast and lunch to take home. Any child, no matter where you’re from or what district you’re in. And if you have siblings at home, you let us know so you can take food home for your other siblings.

We try to keep everybody safe. There’s still a lot of people at work and on the front lines. You have your union out here, doing the work that needs to be done every day. We’re just here to try to make sure everybody, no matter who you are, is taken care of, that everybody is safe.

The schools closed and I will be out at all the sites to make sure everything is there. I’m in constant touch with the OAPSE president and the city schools are in touch with managers to make sure all the kids are safe.

We are taking every precaution, going through all the procedures, wearing gloves, using hand sanitizer, wearing masks. We keep our distance, we are doing everything we can to make sure we can get this virus not to affect anyone.

Somebody’s got to be out there. Our drivers are out there and we are rotating to make sure if anyone is sick, we take their temperatures. We’re making sure everyone is safe.

Custodians are cleaning the buildings from top to bottom, disinfecting everything.

When you’re dealing with food service you’re always in some sort of emergency. I’m very sympathetic to other people’s needs. Whatever the need is, that’s what we’re trying to fulfill.

Everybody has expressed gratitude. I’ve had people who wanted to hug me. People are really thankful. They’re really humbled and it really humbles me. That’s all I want to do, it’s just help. You can see it in their eyes. I’m glad to do anything to help.

As [union] vice president, I am making sure everyone is doing what they need to do in this pandemic, but also making sure they’re available and able to work through our contract. We’re out to do everything we can, Columbus City is living up to our contract.

I am glad that I am a part of this union. As I reiterate to the staff, these are times you can look upon your union and be grateful that they're there. It's safety net that not a lot of people have. I keep reiterating these are the things we are fighting for on a daily basis. It's nice to be good to your fellow brothers and sisters, but not everyone plays nice. We have people out there fighting. This is one of those times I am glad to be sticking with my union.”

*Head Custodian from Columbus, OH (Story from AFSCME)*

“Derrick Fields, a head custodian at Medina Middle School in Columbus, Ohio, and president of OAPSE Local 580, works every day to provide a safe and sanitary learning environment for the roughly 400 students who attend his school.

‘If we fail to keep classrooms, gymnasiums and cafeterias clean, that means both students and staff risk getting sick or injured,’ said Fields. ‘Amid the spread of a highly contagious and lethal virus, this work – although largely out of sight – becomes even more important in keeping our communities safe and healthy.’

Fields said his greatest concern is ensuring the health and well-being of Columbus’ children when they return to school once they reopen. Many students at his school don’t have food at home. Despite the risks associated with venturing into the community, Fields has volunteered to assist in providing breakfast and lunch to kids in 13 locations during Ohio’s school shutdown.”

## Oregon

*Farmworker from Cornelius, OR (Story from UFW)*

“Sometimes I don’t feel like an essential worker because we are not taking enough precautions, but they have taken some precautions in other areas of my work.

My company makes us wash our hands before getting into the carpool van, but we're piled up for 15 minutes with 8 or 10 workers as we ride to and from work. I feel like I am at risk of getting contaminated during that time of driving to work. I work and live in a remote farm area and we're now working with people who live in bigger cities who are of higher likelihood of having coronavirus. Workers are being asked to wash our hands more often.

I haven’t lost work, but I have been impacted by coronavirus with my mental health. I’m more anxious and more stressed out. I can’t leave my house to unwind. I’m earning the same financially because I am working the same hours. But most nursery workers have been laid off.”

*Farmworker from Hermiston, OR (Story from UFW)*

“Without the pandemic, things would be the same without taking into consideration, without valuing the work that we perform and that we have always been ‘essential.’ Our work will always be of first-rate quality, because our hands work the earth and harvest the fruits that it produces no matter how harsh the weather is and we are always committed to this great nation. It is now time that people take us into consideration as part of this society now that we are ‘essential.’

Under the coronavirus pandemic your daily life completely changes, you have the fear of getting infected, because you have to leave for work to provide for your family. With the restrictions that have been put in place, there's a scarcity of essential items in the grocery stores and economically your income is impacted."

*Farmworker from Vale, OR (Story from UFW)*

"I believe that I have not been treated as an essential worker due to the fact that very few precautions are being taken at my workplace. We have not received hazard pay or any type of bonus. I am risking my life and face the possibility of getting sick. I am scared. I am in a setting where the virus can be transmitted easily as we work in large groups. The government has done a terrible job protecting those who are the BACKBONE of America.

At my work they have taken some precautions but they can take more action so that they can stop the virus from spreading. Such as keeping everyone separated. Simple steps such as keeping distance between the rows but overall they have done a good job. If I get the virus I will be able to recover but my coworkers have a higher risk of getting super sick. They wouldn't go to the doctors due to their legal status, financial issues, and they are not informed about the symptoms of the virus.

As a family of farmworkers we've been directly impacted. My mother is terrified of going out. But because my family works in 'essential jobs' we've had a stable income. Although I am putting myself at risk without being sure if my employer were to cover the cost if I were to get sick. Due to the coronavirus shutting down our schools I have been required to work and that is putting at risk my education. I know many other families doing the same. Children of farmworkers are being required to go to work rather than doing online schooling and that is putting them at risk as well. There are children who used to get their meals at school. They are not always able to go pick up meals that are currently being distributed at schools, now parents have to pay that extra expense. As well as having to pay for daycare services when children used to be in school. These families now have to pay more money on groceries and essential items."

*Farmworker from Vale, OR (Story from UFW)*

"Yes, I recognize I am considered an essential worker because cows eat, need their pens cleaned, produce milk, and need to be tended to whether there is an illness out there or not. On the other hand, I haven't felt like an essential worker because consumers go and buy milk products and they don't know what it takes for the product to be ready for them to consume. Regardless whether consumers buy cheese, yogurt, or milk we help produce that product. Our 'essential' work, it's what we do daily so that we can make sure that they have products they need. I don't see my boss seeing me as an essential worker because there haven't been a large number of coronavirus cases here yet. But they are worried because they provided us with documentation stating we are essential workers. Why did they give us the work documentation stating we are their employees? Because they don't want us to stop coming to work.

I don't think the dairy I work for is worried about keeping me safe from the coronavirus because they haven't done anything. For our job the majority of tasks we are assigned, we do have six feet of distance, besides the milking parlor. But the employer has not provided us with any information. I am worried about getting ill and not being able to go to work. Not being able to pay my bills, mortgage, car payment, food for my family. I am worried about contracting the virus because due to my legal status, I do not have

medical coverage and am not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare. I worry about not being able to work and not being able to feed our children.

I am held hostage by the coronavirus. We go from work straight home. We cannot go buy groceries without worrying about contracting the virus. As a dairy worker my job doesn't stop because of COVID-19, my job continues, I cannot do my job from a home office. By the time I go to the grocery store the products that are on the shelves are scarce. When I can find these scarce supplies, they've increased in price tag like bleach and toilet paper. I'm spending more money on basic necessities. We are also limited on the products we can buy and we cannot spend more than our paychecks allow. I wish our employers would take into consideration that we are not animals that we are humans. We are humans that have needs; we need information and protections, not just now during the pandemic.

I ask the government to provide work permits so that we could go buy our groceries without fear. We are fearful of the police officer down the street. We are asking for our elected officials to support farmworkers. Although farmworkers have low salaries; these are the people working long shifts 12 hours at time. Farmworkers are often doing jobs that are often dirty and tiresome. I welcome elected officials to come and join us and walk a day in our shoes so they know how exhausting our jobs really are in reality. Understand what it feels like to be working in 100 degree weather. While they don't know our necessities they also don't know how we are suffering. They need to put themselves in our shoes."

*Farmworker from Vale, OR (Story from UFW)*

"I have not felt like an essential worker until now. They have never said that we were essential workers until now. But how many years have we been working in the fields? I thought, don't I deserve a work permit to go to labor in the fields? If I am an essential worker shouldn't I be able to visit my family in Mexico?

Our company has taken some precautions but have not taken other precautions to keep us safe. Yes, they are giving us the information but at times the job that we have we need to be next to one another. Sometimes we cannot keep to the six feet guideline due to the work we are required to do. Sometimes the task requires two of us to be close. At times we have to switch from labor fields and we don't have the bathrooms or the ability to wash our hands. I've decided to make sure to carry my own hand sanitizer. The company is taking precautions but has not provided protective equipment such as hand sanitizer or disinfectant spray even if we have to use a company car. I've thought to myself, why did our boss ask our hiring company who would be responsible if we tested positive for coronavirus? I am worried that if I get coronavirus what's going to happen to the medical bills? I'm not sure if our company will pay for sick pay, that's something we've never used.

We work day to day to earn our salary. Since our jobs are seasonal, sometimes we work a lot and sometimes there is very little work. We recently had a lot of rain so we were not able to work. We are working but we are exposing ourselves so that we can bring food to the table of our families. We want to be able to provide a stable home for our family and pay for our electricity and water bills. On top of that we are paying for childcare. I'm worried about my children's education and being able to provide them food. We help plant the seeds that we later harvest to get food to the tables of all the people in this country. People consume the potatoes, onion, carrots that we harvest and make food for their families."

*Farmworker from Vale, OR (Story from UFW)*

“I feel like I am treated as an essential employee. I feel protected right now against the coronavirus at my workplace. We have had bathrooms with soap, paper towels, water and disinfectant. They make sure they have the bathroom everywhere we go. They have usually had bathrooms but now they make sure wherever we go we have the bathroom. They are trying to ensure that they take care of us whether we cut ourselves or are feeling ill.

My employer has made sure that we have medical insurance if anything were to happen. This is new. I feel relieved knowing that I have insurance as a beneficiary of my husband.

Our family dynamic at home has changed. We have never had the internet at home but my daughter who is in college has to switch to taking classes online. Now my daughter and nephew both need internet service to do their school work. Before the coronavirus pandemic we didn't have this service, now we are having to pay for this service. Since we have been working we haven't been able to buy toilet paper, it's all gone. I wish the government would give us a legal work permit. A permit to be able to go to Mexico and see my family and come back. But most of all, we can work without fear of deportation.”

*Waitress from Monroe, OR (Story from MomsRising)*

“I'm a MomsRising member living in Oregon. My family is out of food, my hours at work were cut, and my childcare has a 10 kid limit. I've already been turned away for childcare twice as I was trying to drop my kid off because of the priority for emergency personnel, so I had to call out of work and lose even more income. There's no food on our shelves so we've been living off of pasta. I worry every day about whether or not I will lose my job altogether as a food service worker because of the coronavirus.”

## Pennsylvania

*Small Business Owner from Oreland, PA (Story from MomsRising)*

“I'm a MomsRising member living in Montgomery County, PA—the epicenter of the Pennsylvania outbreak. I own a small business, which I have had to close for the next two weeks to protect both my health and the health of my 82-year-old mother, who lives with me and has COPD. My second job, which provides no paid leave of any kind, has closed for at least the next three weeks. I will likely be unable to even pay my rent on the shop, much less for my car, home electric, gas, water and credit cards.”

## Tennessee

*Bartender from Nashville, TN (Story from MomsRising)*

“As the result of the coronavirus, I have lost my job as a banquet server/bartender. Losing this job means that I've also lost my health insurance benefits and I have to take medication which I will not be able to afford without insurance. The whole food and beverage industry is being hit hard and there are no more jobs available since everyone is cutting back and/or laying off workers.”

## Texas

### *Correctional Officer from Gatesville, TX (Story from AFSCME)*

“Among the most lethal places the coronavirus could spread is throughout a prison.

Close confines, stringent security measures and the inability of both offenders and prison personnel – corrections officers, prison staff, wardens and many others – to maintain the kind of social distancing being called for requires a special kind of vigilance. Telework is not an option.

For Tanisha Woods, a correctional officer at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s Dr. Lane Murray Unit, a women’s prison in Gatesville, the risk of contamination is high. While Woods doesn’t believe any of the 1,300 offenders and around 600 staff at her facility, have been infected, her facility is taking no chances.

No visitors are allowed. Woods and other officers are washing their hands more often and are making sure the facility is diligently cleaned by the offenders who are assigned to janitorial duty.

She has seen a ‘boost up’ in the cleaning equipment and supplies at her facility. More gloves are being made available, more chemicals are being used, more soap is on hand. While there had been shortages in the past, Woods’ employer is taking the situation seriously with the coronavirus pandemic in full swing.

Nevertheless, now more than ever, state and local government need expanded federal aid, as well as a greater investment in robust public services.

‘The fear is there, but this is my job,’ says Woods, president of AFSCME Local 3920. ‘I can’t let that cripple me. I can’t do less because of fear. I just think positive and try to be knowledgeable about what’s going on in order to keep myself and [those I work with] safe. I am a woman of faith, so that’s what I hold on to as well.’

Woods knows that even though correctional officers may not be in the spotlight, the services they provide are essential.

‘I have decided this is my career. I love what I do,’ says Woods. ‘We risk our lives for the safety of offenders. We put our lives on the line. But sometimes we don’t get the respect we deserve.’”

### *Airport Ramp Agent from Houston, TX (Story from SEIU)*

Working people, like Sasha Brooks of Houston, TX, and their unions must be at the table as leaders develop responses to coronavirus. Sasha, a ramp agent at George Bush Intercontinental Airport, is one of many airport workers across the country urging elected officials to make sure essential workers stay on the payroll and have the essential pay and PPE they need to do their jobs and keep themselves safe. The mother of four was recently laid off from her job and isn’t eligible for unemployment.

“It was hard enough for people like me to get by before the coronavirus hit, now it is impossible,” says Sasha, who was making \$10/hr. at the airport. “While the airlines and other corporations are receiving billions in federal aid, I sit here in my apartment surrounded by my four children and my 75-year old Auntie worrying about how I am going to be able to keep food on the table.”

“The CEO’s of companies like United and our politicians need to think about people like me,” says Sasha. “We need help. Help us get healthcare if we need it, make sure we are protected from the Coronavirus and can get tested and healthcare if we are sick.”

*Mother from Carrollton, TX (Story from MomsRising)*

“I’m a MomsRising member that was pregnant during the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, and I just gave birth to my beautiful baby boy. But before his birth, his father and I lost our jobs due to the virus. We are now barely hanging on by a thread and are terrified about how we are going to pay for food and all of our other basic needs – housing, electricity, etc.”

## Washington

*Farmworker from Mabton, WA (Story from UFW)*

“For the past two weeks I have been laid off work but now they brought us back because we are essential workers. Because in agriculture if we don’t prepare the grape plants it will not produce good fruit. If we don’t trim the grape plants they get infested and don’t produce good quality wine.

I’m currently working, and now that we’ve come back I’ve felt like an essential worker because first of all our employer (UFW contract company) has given us a lot of information, and apart from that they are concerned about each of us making sure to maintain our distance and they are disinfecting the bathrooms each time that somebody uses it. I can say that I’m being treated as an essential worker.

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted me a lot because you’re afraid of everything you touch outside of the house and I’m also very worried at the same time because many people are not taking the pandemic seriously. And what also impacts me is the cost increase of groceries. It’s being abused a lot. For example, roma tomatoes used to cost \$1.45 per pound and now they cost \$3.35 per pound. Five dozen eggs used to cost \$6 and now it’s \$15. Milk costs a dollar more, so does meat. Everything is going up, only the gas is cheap.

Right now some childcare places are closed, and many parents are taking their kids to daycare homes that have less kids and have to pay more than what they paid for before. Right now, of my children only one is working and she takes her kids to another sister who is a teacher and she’s taking care of those kids. And my other children aren’t working, so they’re watching their kids. But regardless they are still impacted, because the unemployment check is not enough to cover all the bills.”

*Farmworker from Sunnyside, WA (Story from UFW)*

“I work as a farmworker in agriculture and right now I’m thinning apple tree blossoms. For over 16 years I’ve worked in the fields in various types of crops- apples, cherries, blueberries, hops, grapes, onion and asparagus- almost all of the agricultural jobs in the state of Washington.

I’m an essential worker but I don’t feel secure in my job because my company is not giving me enough information about the coronavirus pandemic and I’m working in high risk conditions. There is no toilet paper, the bathrooms are very dirty and they basically never clean them. We are also working under



threats because our supervisor told us we have to bring our own toilet paper and that workers who don't bring their own toilet paper shouldn't come to work.

The company I work for is not complying with the health and safety regulations. I also don't have any kind of health insurance. This pandemic is affecting me a lot. I can't go out with my family like before, we have to be inside our house all the time. I only go from my house to work. All of the food is expensive. Right now I'm struggling with childcare for my children- there are days when I can't find anyone to look after them."

*Early Childhood Educator from Spokane Valley, WA (Story from MomsRising)*

"McKyndree worked in the restaurant industry for many years and didn't have the ability to earn even a single paid sick day. At the same time, she had two young children and interacted with many people each day as part of her job, increasing her risk of becoming ill and spreading contagion. Knowing she wouldn't get paid if she or one of her children became ill was a constant, major source of stress for her family. Missing just one day of pay threatened her ability to make ends meet. Today, McKyndree works in early childhood education and finally has access to paid sick days. She says it has made an enormous difference. Just last week, she was able to take time off work to go to the doctor. She says it is incredibly important to her to be able to proactively take care of her health and her children's health, as well as stay home when she and/or her children are sick, without risking her paycheck." - Tanya Goldman, Senior Policy Analyst at CLASP

*Passenger Service Assistant from Tukwila, WA (Story from SEIU)*

Investing in providing direct support to employers would help keep working people like Yonas Thompson of Washington State on the job.

Yonas, a passenger service assistant at Sea-Tac Airport, came to the United States from Ethiopia four years ago seeking asylum from attacks that left thousands of extrajudicial killings and incarcerations against his ethnic and political groups. In the US, the husband and father of six works 14-hours a day between his job at the airport and his Amazon delivery jobs while still managing to video chat his family back home. His children are disturbed by the news of the US coronavirus toll while Yonas worries even more about his children's fate if the worst happens in a country that can merely afford to treat patients with ventilators.

Since March, he has also worried about his future as the coronavirus continues to slow-down travel at the airport. Yonas and his coworkers rely heavily on tips from passengers and are concerned about returning to their jobs after their recent lay-offs at the airport. He says, normally, if someone sees their hours being cut at work, they may look for other work, "but now every potential employer is in the same position."

"The Corona has taken everyone by surprise," says Yonas. "What is my fate? What am I going to do? People are stressed; some are depressed about it. It's an extraordinary challenge that we're pressed with."

He believes that the airline industry must be held accountable to use the federal economic relief to protect airport workers and employ as many workers as possible during this crisis.

"The government should learn from past mistakes. They should make sure the companies are still hiring people and contributing to the economy like they intended in the CARES Act," says Yonas. "The true

investors (in these companies) are the folks living paycheck to paycheck as they fully invest their earnings in paying their bills and providing for their families. They are pillars of the economy left and right; working hard and investing their earnings too. The government should make sure this money is coming back to the taxpayers if it is really eager to revamp the economy.”

## Wisconsin

*Gig Worker from Janesville, WI (Story from MomsRising)*

“I’m a MomsRising member and a single mom who is self-employed doing contract work in the gig economy for companies like Doordash, Shipt, Uber Eats, and Roadie as my sole income. I can’t work because my child’s school is closed and even if this weren’t the case, it would be dangerous for me to work because I recently finished breast cancer treatment. I don’t know how I will pay my rent or electric bill.”